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### **From Colonial State to Gatekeeper State in Africa**

by

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## Abstract

My essay interprets the malaise of African states based not on their supposed inherent characteristics (colonial legacy, culture), but on historical processes. In the decade after World War II, citizen mobilization opened up a range of possibilities—turning empire into federation, African unification—and put social and economic reform on the political agenda. In 1945, neither European powers nor African political movements saw independence as their primary goal. But by the late 1950s devolution of power to independent nation-states turned out to be the point on which African elites and colonial rulers could make a deal. Both saw the mobilization of citizens as a threat. The opening and closing of political possibilities left new states without the means to challenge the narrowness of colonial economies, fearful of demands for social change, and caught in a politics of clientage and exclusion to maintain state control of those narrow channels.

## About the Author

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## Introduction

Africa's malaise is widely recognized, not least by African intellectuals, who since the 1960s have been writing critically about their own governments and societies, so much so that some describe their point of view as "afro-pessimism." One often hears two competing visions of blame for the long-lasting economic and political crisis: Africa as the victim of colonialism and continued exploitation and Africa as caught in its own cultural incapacity to rule and to prosper. Neither explanation is an explanation at all, and my goal is to get away from such static invocations of single causes toward a more historical view of Africa and its engagement with the rest of the world. My argument entails a number of basic propositions: Africa is not uniform and the fate of different parts of it are not necessarily going to be the same; Africa was not an unchanging space suddenly transformed by colonization and then by decolonization, but rather the site of varied historical trajectories, going back in time and extending to the present; and Africa has not, in historical times, been isolated and its history has more to do with its interactions than with its apparently essential nature. I will emphasize most the last point: African and European actors are the co-authors of Africa's current situation, and it is hard to imagine solutions that will not be co-authored as well.

## The External Connection: Trade and Colonization

Africa has been vulnerable not because it has been isolated, but because it has been extraverted.<sup>i</sup> The continent was laced with trade routes; movements of people were long extensive; and connections beyond the continent, including across the Sahara desert and Indian Ocean, go back to ancient times. Beginning slowly during the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Portuguese expeditions were able to concentrate naval forces sufficiently to establish fortified enclaves in certain ports, but they depended for their economic roles on tapping onto preexisting commercial channels and providing reason for African merchants to do business with them. Initially trading in a considerable range of commodities, European traders—Dutch, British, French and others—contributed to a focus in a long stretch of coast from West to West-Central Africa on the export of slaves.

The slave trade, which peaked in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, had particular implications which the people who participated in it at the beginning had no way to anticipate.<sup>ii</sup> The puzzle historians face is not why European traders bought slaves to labor on sugar plantations in their West Indian colonies, but why African rulers sold them—certainly not all, but enough to put pressure on the others. The issue is not why Africans sold "their" people, but why rulers sold other people. They were responding to a structural situation whose implications they could not know. Much of West and Central Africa consisted of islands of population density separated from others. This posed a dilemma to rulers: how to gain followers and get something from them, when a combination of geographic dispersion and the relative strength of kinship networks meant that extracting too much labor or resources would induce entire groups of people to leave, perhaps to a less desirable but still tolerable location. African kings tried to externalize their exploitation—to take slaves and other resources from outside their borders, giving their own subjects a stake in an expansionist, hierarchical system rather than extracting too much from them. Such a process could be self-limiting, because conquest turned the foreigner into the dependent member of the polity. But the growth of European empires in the Americas changed that: not only could the source of wealth—captives—be externalized, but so could the always dangerous supervision of labor. To be sure, the income

slaves could have produced was foregone, but no one knew how great that could have been. The most militarized kingdoms gained the most this way, and the best defenses were emulation or migration away. Tendencies to develop more intensive forms of indigenous production became risky in regions affected by the slave trade.<sup>iii</sup>

When European powers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century changed their minds about the morality and utility of the slave trade, West African societies adapted. In some areas, peasants—now able to export peanuts or other locally grown products—benefited at the expense of former slave trading aristocracies. In others, slave-based agriculture superceded slave exports, keeping intact a system of raids and violence.<sup>iv</sup> Overall, patterns were highly uneven, and regional and local dynamics crucial to determining how production and commerce evolved. But it is hard to find in Africa the kind of intensification of labor found in North Atlantic economic systems since the 18<sup>th</sup> century; externalization remained an important tendency.

Colonial states faced the same dilemma as the African king: how to control an African population to whom geographic dispersal and organization into decentralized communities gave a strong "exit" option. One alternative would have been giving them strong incentives to engage in commerce, and indeed in the cocoa growing areas of southern Gold Coast and elsewhere, African farmers proved to be innovative participants in production and exchange, giving rise to a modest regional prosperity in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>v</sup> But colonizers needed to establish control and obtain revenue regardless of market conditions, indigenous people's responses to them, or the relationship of colonial interests to African commercial networks.

The ability of even the two largest-scale colonizers—France and Great Britain, which will be the focus of what follows—to exercise routine power and to bring about change on their own terms was very uneven. Scholars have tended to take an aspect of the colonial record that was valid in some places at some times and project it onto a colonial legacy as a whole. For example the "decentralized despotisms" which colonial powers used to exercise authority in rural areas, especially in the 1920s and 1930s becomes the operative mechanism, even though such despotisms were cross cut by different kinds of networks at that time, and the 1940s and 1960s witnessed both a colonial policy of technocratic innovation from the center and an escalation of claims from African political and social movements, many of which constituted a politics of citizenship.<sup>vi</sup> Or one can take the policy of technocratic innovation as the essence of colonialism, forgetting how little funding was put into it before 1945, how much the conservative policy of supporting chiefs ran in a different direction, and how much the supposedly statist, technocratic post-war eras was also an era of political mobilization and confrontation.<sup>vii</sup> To deduce a legacy of authoritarianism from either version misses crucial dynamics and tensions. A more historical, more interactive, more dialectical approach is needed.

The easy part of colonization was conquest: with machine guns and telegraph, conquering armies in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century could concentrate their forces, defeat the armies of kings or burn villages, take away cattle, and terrorize the population, then move on to the next target. What was hard to do was routinize power. Nor was it clear that even modest

agricultural expansion would pay the cost of administering large territories with spread-out populations and only pockets of high interest for export production.

The modern colonizers did what empire builders long did: try to coopt indigenous elites into playing essential but subordinate roles in running the empire. What the French from the 1870s called "la mission civilisatrice" became a minimalist project, with little money devoted to education or health and with the early generations of educated Africans increasingly treated like peculiar anomalies, as power was organized around figures labeled "traditional." The chiefs were not cogs in a bureaucratic state apparatus, but men whose authority rested on a varied and often complex politics of adaptation and modification of older authority systems, on using the patronage and the sanctions of local colonial officials to build networks and punish rivals, and on hitching their own efforts at amassing resources in land, commercial connections, and local influence to colonial projects.<sup>viii</sup> Reliance on chiefs rigidified ethnicity; many of today's ethnic cleavages have their roots in colonial times. Economically, colonial Africa looked like a patchwork: zones of African agricultural initiative, areas of white settlement, and mine towns, surrounded by much larger areas that could serve as labor catchment areas, but where colonial authority had neither the motivation nor the power to effect systematic change.<sup>ix</sup>

What colonial regimes could do was control port cities. These became symbols of power—with their grid-like streets, European-style buildings, and segregated spaces—and they were nodal points in a communications system that had very few nodes.<sup>x</sup> Most revenue was collected there, in the form of import and export taxes. Colonial communication routes were few in number and narrow—even Kenya, with its settlers, had only a narrow-gauge railway connecting the port of Mombasa with the interior. Such railways were enough to create incentives to concentrate high-bulk agricultural production along a narrow corridor, if anything undercutting the more ramified portage routes that had connected distant parts of Africa with each other before colonization.

If one reads colonial reports from the 1920s, one learns that British and French officials were to a large extent aware of the mediocrity of their own achievements. Officials in both governments proposed in the early 1920s what they called development programs—mainly aimed at improving transportation and infrastructure. But both governments refused to finance the plans, on the grounds that the taxes of metropolitan taxpayers were best spent at home and—as more conservative colonial officials argued—development might upset the delicate arrangements with African chiefs that were crucial to maintaining order.<sup>xi</sup>

We have here the making of what we might call the gatekeeper state: a government able to manage and profit from the interface between a colonial territory and the world market, as well as narrow links to specific areas of the interior, with weak control over interior spaces, relying on what the British called "indirect rule" and the French "association" to exercise authority over the vast spaces of colonial hinterlands. Economic activity—new crops, trading mechanisms to exchange the cattle of the savanna for the kola nuts of the forest—did develop within and often around colonial economies, but this was highly disarticulated. Whenever a colonial government tried to do anything to remedy this situation, the remedy had to be cheap, and the payment of low wages—and the reliance in much of

Portuguese Africa and parts of French on forced labor to get people into public works projects or settler farms--did not help to produce an integrated labor market. Instead, people had every incentive to flee the very areas where export production was taking place--the "exit option" appears once again.

When the depression of 1929 hit, colonial governments took comfort in the fact that affected African workers and producers could retreat to village communities, where their difficulties would be hidden and would require no government expense. But the depression encouraged populations to see their communities more as refuges than as part of a pattern of economic integration.<sup>xii</sup>

### **Colonialism in Crisis**

What shook the stability of the French and British empires in Africa was not the depression, but what followed--a wave of strikes began with the return of economic activity and, in British Africa, escalated during the war, continuing through the late 1940s. Given the narrow channels which linked African production--whether directed by peasants or European capitalists--to the world market, even relatively small-scale threats to communications nodes were serious. But the sense of crisis emerged within the particular ideological framework of colonial rule. When economic activity slowly picked up, French and British governments feared that rural villages would not send forth laborers now in demand, but their focus on a low-wage, low-cost economy was such that they did little to improve incentives. The result in British Africa was a series of strikes and urban mass movements--something that happened in the British West Indies as well--and that at last started the Colonial Office to rethink its policies. The investigations of the late 1930s were remarkable admissions by officials of the weaknesses of colonial economies, and London set off on a new direction that culminated in the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940.<sup>xiii</sup>

Would "development" prove to be a change in the path taken in Africa, where the terms of interaction--shaped by resistance to precolonial and colonial rulers as much as by the direct effects of their power--had fostered fragmentation, ethnic cleavages, and uncertainty about whether economic integration should be embraced or avoided? The question is still with us. The British development act of 1940--and its French equivalent dating to 1946--marked the beginning of what we might call the "development era," which bridged the colonial and postcolonial eras. I will, later in this paper, present an argument about the historical significance of this era, but the question to examine for the moment is a political one: to what extent was it possible in this conjuncture for empires to reinvigorate colonial rule and how did political and social movements in Africa seize the possibilities opened up by the attempt?

World War II was a critical moment, especially in British Africa. Having lost tropical colonies in South East Asia, Great Britain needed Africa more than ever, but given the war effort, it had little to offer the expanded wage labor force. The war not surprisingly brought on a series of social crises in port cities, mine towns, and railway lines, and the very narrowness of those channels made the labor conflict more serious. It plunged officials into a more specific engagement with social questions than the more general promise to raise the standard of living implied. Only a series of wage and benefit concessions--against the advice

of economists—kept the social situation from getting out of hand. Officials were forced to consider that overstressed urban resources had to be upgraded—housing in particular—and that thinking of Africans as tribal people temporarily in urban wage labor was producing a "floating population" in the cities that could not easily be socialized into urban life. Officials were forced into a rethinking of the relationship of city and country and of the relationship of African cultural particularity to what were seen as universal problems of industrialization and urbanization. The old mechanisms of colonial authority—the fiction of Africans as tribal people accepting the legitimacy of "traditional" leaders and lost without their paternalistic control—proved useless in the face of challenges in West and East African ports, in Central African mines, and in railway lines in different parts of the continent.

The post-war years, with high inflation, shortage of manufactured goods, and acute pressure on urban resources, brought on a continued wave of strikes and urban unrest, in French as well as British Africa. Both French and British officials tried to substitute an alternative fiction, that African workers were just like any other worker and could be dealt with by mechanisms used to tame industrial conflict in Europe.<sup>xiv</sup>

Meanwhile, the politics of the situation were changing, for mobilization against Hitler cast the ordinariness of racial discrimination and racial ideologies in colonies into a new light in international fora. The response of colonial governments was not to give up on colonial rule in Africa, but to try both to reinvigorate and to relegitimize it, giving Africans a stake in economic development and increased voice in political affairs. France tried to do this by declaring all colonial subjects to be citizens and incorporating elected representatives—in numbers disproportionately low in regard to population—into the Paris legislature, while Great Britain tried to incorporate Africans into local government within each territory. Portugal and Belgium tried to follow a development oriented economic policy while making no concessions on political participation or rights.

### **Decolonization in the Development Era**

None of the colonial powers was able to contain the political dynamic unleashed by the twin program of economic activism and political participation. The attempt to get beyond the confines of a gatekeeper state and undertake transformation of rural and urban areas ran into blockages stemming from the narrowness of the gate, stalling projects and empowering a relatively small number of workers in port cities and railways. More important, the effort brought colonial rulers into numerous and complex social and political conflicts. African political parties and trade unions used the space they were given to escalate demands, notably insisting that claims that Africans were participants in an imperial polity meant that they should be given full equality—in wages, education, and public services as well as in politics. In France, labor unions were particularly successful in demanding a labor code for the colonies which would guarantee rights and entitlements equivalent to those enjoyed by metropolitan workers: the 40-hour week, paid vacations, the right to organize and strike, minimum wages. The stakes of a non-racial code were so high that the parliamentary battle over its contents took six years, but after campaigns and strikes in West Africa as well as much effort by African parliamentarians in Paris, the code was enacted in 1952. It set the stage for new struggles over its implementation and extension. Veterans groups similarly organized for equality of pensions, while students were demanding equality of education.<sup>xv</sup>

In British colonies, the fiction of self-government was as powerful as the French fiction of shared citizenship in an imperial polity, and the government was no more able to contain the dynamics which African mobilization unleashed within and beyond the intended framework. Trying to interest educated Africans in "local" government, where they were hoped to inject a modernizing aura into what had heretofore been defended as a bastion of African traditions, colonial governments were faced with demands for power at the center of each colonial territory. The Gold Coast was the pioneer, where a politically sophisticated political and trade union movement escalated pressure immediately after the war. When a movement to boycott European businesses and an ex-servicemen's march demanding jobs and recognition for war service came to a head—and a panicked police force fired on the ex-soldiers—a wave of violence ensued. Government efforts to repress militant politics in the Gold Coast—while making a plausible attempt to address the underlying causes of the unrest—led them into a quest for the mythical moderate African politician, but in the end the only interlocutor they could find with plausible popular support was the very man they had seen as a demagogue inciting unruly masses, Kwame Nkrumah. Nkrumah had in fact stitched together an uneasy coalition of volatile youth, militant trade unionists, and more generally an urban population, concentrated in southern Gold Coast, that was facing the dislocations and hardships of growing cities without remotely adequate social services, plus more spotty and contingent support from some rural elements. When in 1951, his party won an election contested under terms worked out to appease "moderate" opinion in the Gold Coast, the British were stuck with a choice between remaking Nkrumah as the mythic moderate or facing disorder whose potential they could only guess at.

As Nkrumah's leadership went from a form of domestic self-rule to independence as the nation of Ghana in 1957, his country became the model decolonization—in more ways than one. It was an inspiration for neighbors, francophone as well as anglophone, for whom the path was now illuminated, and it revealed that an African leader could tame trade unionists, farmers, and students in ways that the colonial regime after the war could only envy.<sup>xvi</sup>

Meanwhile, economic development—a consequence of market conditions as well as policy—unleashed as much conflict as it ameliorated. In some rural areas, this took the form of movements to "heal the land" or restore an indigenous community being seemingly threatened by greed among local people as well as by the land grabbing of white settlers in places like Kenya.<sup>xvii</sup> When African political and social movements spilled over an unmarked frontier into what officials saw as a total rejection of their modernizing project, the colonial reaction could reach a level of brutality that suggests a kind of bitterness. Such was the case with the Mau Mau Emergency beginning in the 1950s in Kenya and to a somewhat less dramatic extent in the French action against a radical movement in the Cameroons.<sup>xviii</sup>

Development projects had their successes too, but not the systematic remaking of economic structures that some planners expected. The weakness of port facilities, transport, urban infrastructure, and economic linkages within colonial economies—as well as a lack of trained personnel—meant that colonial economies had trouble absorbing capital spending, leading to escalations in cost.<sup>xix</sup>



In the mid-1950s, both France and Britain conducted cost-benefit analyses of their colonies of a sort never attempted before.<sup>xx</sup> The results were not encouraging, not because production was stagnating—it was increasing as never before—but because growth patterns were so uneven and demands on the colonial state so rapidly growing. Beset by African political and social movements insisting on either full equality or full control and by radical movements against colonial rule, the possibility of devolving power became more attractive to colonial rulers. The fear of escalating demands was brought to the attention of the French legislature in 1956: citizenship had come to mean "equality in wages, equality in labour legislation, in social security benefits, equality in family allowances, in brief, equality in standard of living."<sup>xxi</sup> The French government at that point tried to remove the French standard of living as the reference point for African demands, even though that meant renouncing the basic principle of imperial unity and the centralized structure of French administration in favor of "territorialization," giving budgetary authority to each colonial territory, with by now an African majority in the territorial legislature. Responsible to the taxpayers of that territory, African governments would hopefully measure their response to demands for higher wages or better sources against territorial resources, not against imperial ones.

The British cost-benefit analysis of 1957 made clear both the uncertainty of economic gains from keeping colonies and the need for anticipating pressures in a world in which colonies were no longer the norm.

Although damage could certainly be done by the premature grant of independence, the economic dangers to the United Kingdom of deferring the grant of independence for her own selfish interests after the country is politically and economically ripe for independence would be far greater than any dangers resulting from an act of independence negotiated in an atmosphere of goodwill such as has been the case with Ghana and the Federation of Malaya. Meanwhile, during the period when we can still exercise control in any territory, it is most important to take every step open to us to ensure, as far as we can, that British standards and methods of business and administration permeate the whole life of the territory.<sup>xxii</sup>

The goal now was not to keep colonies in the empire, but to keep them tied to a British way of life – something British colonial policy before the war had been intent on keeping Africans away from. Officials could only hope that British discourse and practice had framed the question of governance and that ex-colonies would become Western-style nations.

In both cases, the episode of developmental colonialism was extremely important ideologically, even if its practical results were mixed. It convinced colonial rulers that many Africans believed in some form of modernization and that they would seek a positive relationship with former colonial powers after independence. Decolonization became an imaginable alternative to empire.

Political movements in the 1950s had claimed that they could manage development in the interests of their people whereas colonial development was tainted by European rulers' long record of exploitation. Such a stance also raised expectations and made development into both the slogan of many new regimes and a demand placed upon them for concrete

benefits—schools, roads, opportunities. The officials of new nation-states often partook of the same arrogance toward "backward" peasants and small-scale marketeers as their predecessors, but they were more concerned with the implications of development for patron-client relations, with providing resources to people loyal to them and keeping resources away from potential opponents. The first generation of leaders knew from their own experience the potential of claims made on the basis of citizenship—from workers, students, and farmers who had taken seriously the possibility of political mobilizing. The escalation of citizenship claims in the period before independence profoundly affected the attitudes of leaders of newly independent states, sensitive to the fragility of their power. It is no coincidence that two of the African politicians who did the most to mobilize an engaged citizenry, Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana and Sékou Touré in Guinée, were among the first to crack down on labor movements and farmers' movements as soon as they acquired power.

### **National Development and the Gatekeeper State**

What departing colonial powers—Britain and France most notably—left to their successors was a development project they themselves had not been able to bring to fruition. The development project went from being a colonial project to a national project, but it most often remained distant from the actual mechanisms of local economies. It entailed a considerable investment in human capital—schools and health facilities above all—and many people of modest background seized such opportunities to transform their lives.

Taken as a whole, the development era—from the 1940s into the 1970s—had significant achievements. After the 1980s, many observers tended to write off the era, some because state-led development projects represented a deviation from free market practices, others because development represented an imposition of a "European" modernity. But through the 1970s, the development era was not without tangible benefits: Africa as a whole achieved regular, if unspectacular growth rates, an average of 2.4% between 1950 and 1975. The percentage of children enrolled in primary school went from 43% in 1960 to nearly 80% in 1980 before stagnating; secondary school enrollment grew from 3% to 18%. The decline in infant mortality rates (cut in half after 1960) and increased life span (rising from 40 to 52 years before AIDS-induced declines after 1990) are notable. Indeed, what is now perceived to be a problem, population growth, only became a concern in the 1950s and reflects wider access to health care as well as uneven but significant improvement in standard of living in many areas. The unremittingly negative picture of African economies we now have misses much of the development gains of the late colonial and early independence eras and largely reflects the generalized reversal of fortunes of the late 1970s and 1980s.<sup>xxiii</sup>

But the political dimensions of development, in regard to both colonial and postcolonial states, need to be understood alongside the question of economic and social results. If we look at the beginning and end of the development era, we start and end with two sorts of gatekeeper states, the first led by foreign rulers, the second by a domestic ruling elite, both distant from the population it governed, exercising control over a narrow range of resources focused on the juncture of domestic and world economies, fearful of threats to its domination. But in between, more possibilities arose, and those possibilities are still worth thinking about. Hence the importance of focusing carefully on the period from the 1940s

through the 1960s, rather than leapfrogging from an apparently rigid colonialism, arguably dominant in the 1920s and 1930s, to the crises of African politics in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Yet, ironically, the efforts to build national economies in the 1960s and 1970s—dependent on external sources of capital goods and skills and hence on export income—enhanced the external dependency of African economies and did not help African governments to break out of the confines of the gatekeeper state. African rulers, who had no place to go, became more entrapped in gatekeeping than colonial rulers.

If one looks at the question of rule from the point of view of the leader of a newly independent state, the dilemma is striking. Such rulers knew that the nationalism they had evoked in the independence struggle was thin, not because people had some inherently African belief in the virtue of "tribe," but because local social resource were essential to prevent too much dependence on a wage economy or on a state one could not trust.<sup>xxv</sup> Rulers had reason to fear entrepreneurs they could not control. As Catherine Boone argues, the attempts of rulers to impose their power on rural societies produced a range of results. Sometimes rural elites were able to install themselves as power brokers to which central government leaders had to accommodate; sometimes hierarchically organized rural societies or decentralized communities could frustrate government initiatives or deflect them to the advantage of regional intermediaries; and sometimes governments crushed the power of farmers' organizations, often crushing agriculture at the same time. If rural social networks and structures could sometimes shape the degree of state control, stage action could also promote different forms of network formation and solidarity.<sup>xxvi</sup>

From the point of view of the ruled, insecurity often led to strategies economists describe as "straddling": individuals or different family members moved back and forth between local agriculture, urban wage labor, contributing to village social resources so as to secure one's support in a home community, and clientage relationships to political figures in the city.<sup>xxvii</sup> These do not reflect an outdated culture that values collectivity over individual achievement, but rather strategies that entail the preservation of a variety of social ties that can prove useful in hard times. For communities that had lived through the slave trade, colonial labor recruitment, the depression, and the downs and ups of job seeking and entrepreneurial activities, straddling made a lot of sense. The quest to keep options in play helps explain the paradox of high unemployment in Africa, combined with inadequate labor supplies.<sup>xxviii</sup>

Rulers in these situations were likely to fall back on the resources they could count on: institutions of state inherited from the colonial regime, revenue sources that were easily centralized, disbursement of foreign aid that is channeled through central authorities, and paramilitary and clientage systems centered on the ruler's personal connections. The wave of coups that began in Africa in the 1960s suggest that there was nothing paranoid about the fears of so many rulers. Such instability was characteristic of the gatekeeper state itself, for with so much at stake in the control of the gate—the intersection of state institutions with the world economy and international agencies—the gate was worth struggling for.<sup>xxix</sup> Unlike richer countries with more diverse economies, the effects of losing power in most African states were devastating.

The extremes of the gatekeeper state are found in oil economies, and that explains the paradox of some of the potentially richest African states—Nigeria, Gabon, Congo-Brazzaville, Angola—being among the most unstable and, for most of the population, quite poor. The oil economy, unlike agriculture, requires little local labor and has few linkages with other economic actors. Its orientation is overwhelmingly external, and the key element is the paying of revenues, something the central government jealously guards for itself. While the revenue could in theory be used for diversification, the priorities in the context of a gatekeeper state run toward ensuring that personally loyal supporters will be well rewarded and that patronage will be dispensed in a politically useful way. The claim of ordinary citizens on oil revenue is a particularly weak one.

That said, the range of variation among gatekeeper states is considerable, and it would be a mistake for an outside observer to let the Congo of the 1960s or 1990s, Liberia or Rwanda of the 1990s, or the Côte d'Ivoire or the Sudan today stand in for the entire continent. Especially in the 1960s and early 1970s, states like Kenya or the Côte d'Ivoire managed a gatekeeper state reasonably effectively, and still could promote a few advances for the common good, including schools and clinics and opportunities for joining a diversified patronage apparatus. More recently, Ghana and Uganda have shown that positive social and economic policies can emerge out of crises. In Senegal and Kenya for example, democratic transitions have taken place, in which internal and external forces for free elections have proved stronger than the desire of old regimes to keep their hold on the gate. South Africa is currently the best example of an economy that is large and complex enough that it does not constitute a gatekeeper state. On the other extreme, unresolved conflict has meant that some states are unable to maintain the functions of even a gatekeeper state, so that networks that bypass the gate become predominant or become the state itself, such as it is, a pattern found in Somalia and Sierra Leone.<sup>xxx</sup>

Where does this leave us? Hopefully with an understanding of the historical and structural dilemmas in which African elites and ordinary people find themselves, rather than with a picture of an Africa determined by its inherent nature. The gatekeeper state is neither a choice made by current political actors nor an automatic response to the nature of the world economy or the global system of states. Such states—with their considerable range of effectiveness, repressiveness, openness to countervailing pressures—are the product of an historical process and the question is what kinds of actions by Africans and by thoughtful outsiders can break into vicious circles and offer new possibilities.

One should not forget that African students, farmers, and workers have at times organized to make demands as citizens: such movements made so many claims on, for instance, the French colonial government in the 1950s, that the cost of running an empire of citizens became unbearable. Democracy movements have their place in recent African history: in Nigeria in the 1990s for instance, on the part of church groups and professionals in Kenya organizing against the Moi regime, and most impressively in the sustained anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. The partial success of reform movements have combined activism within African states with support from principled organizations overseas. Conversely, the staying power of somebody like Mobutu of Zaire, in power for 30 years, can only be understood by his combination of patronage and repression at home with support or

at least acquiescence from European states, the United States, and international corporations and financial institutions.

If African states, colonial and post-colonial, produced a mixed record under favorable world economic conditions in the 1950s and 1960s—with improvements in literacy and health set against corruption and, in some cases, violent conflict—the extraversion of all African states made them extremely vulnerable to the oil shocks and world recession of the 1970s. The remedy prescribed by international financial institutions proved to be no cure. If forcing down overvalued currencies and other reforms made good economic sense, the emphasis in structural adjustment plans on cutting budgets meant reversal of the favorable trends in the resources African states needed most to get out of their developmental constraints: education and health services. The undermining of public health systems may have contributed indirectly to the spread of AIDS by letting treatable diseases that facilitate the spread of the virus go unchecked, and poor health infrastructure certainly makes the introduction of antiretrovirals more difficult. Outside of South Africa, external investment—a stated goal of structural adjustment—actually declined after 1980; Africa is less integrated into world markets in the "globalized" present than it was in the era of "national development" in the 1960s.<sup>xxxix</sup> Politically, the effects were even more serious: the fledgling democracy movements of the 1990s had a tough time proving their worth, when even electoral success left leaders with no resources to show that democratic, honest government could pay off for the average citizen.<sup>xxxix</sup>

## Conclusion

The gatekeeper state is neither an African illness nor a European imposition but a Euro-Afro-American coproduction with a long history. If a new generation of Africans is to get out of the difficulties their elders—with help from outside—got them into, we need to take a more balanced view of responsibility. International banking, transnational corporations, donor agencies, and international institutions are not some impersonal embodiment of the "world economy" but are specific institutions, giving rise to particular kinds of power relations. Africa has in precolonial, colonial, and colonial times both engaged with transnational institutions and held them at arms length. African leaders have been caught between a world market, which in differing ways from the slave trade to the nexus of arms/oil/diamonds has not been benign, and populations which seek to mobilize ties that circumvent such channels. As colonial rule collapsed, African leaders were maneuvering between a citizenship politics that had shaken colonial rule and the possibilities of their own manipulation of gatekeeping. The period of mobilization and attempts by colonial and newly independent governments to contain mobilization—rather than a direct "legacy" of an atemporal colonial authoritarianism—is crucial to understanding the development of a fragile authoritarianism in many African states. The maintenance of that authoritarianism over time in part reflects both the difficulties and the high stakes involved in maintaining control of the gate, reaching extremes both when resources available to gatekeeping elites were in short supply—as in the post-1970s financial crises—or in great abundance, as in oil exporting states.

From the days of antislavery movements to opposition to colonial rule to mobilization against apartheid, successful political action has depended not on some pure local "authenticity" fighting against imposed power. Rather, such movements drew much strength

from the resonance between the concerns of local people and networks of supporters in distant lands. Such connections have turned slavery, colonialism, and racial domination from facts of life into political impossibilities. Political change does not come simply from do-good outsiders getting their way or from authentic local communities bringing down the all-powerful. The escalation of citizen politics in the 1940s and 1950s that ultimately proved too much for colonial rule drew on the ability of African leaders to seize and transform institutions and discourses by which European powers had thought to assert their control of colonial modernizing project, but they drew as well on diverse mobilizations in rural and urban Africa that drew on a wide range of cultural idioms and networks.

The future of "western" intervention in Africa is likely to be no better than its past, but the possibility of cooperation across space, within and beyond Africa, remains open. Looking at the years after World War II as a whole is a useful reminder that the possibility that powerful structures can be changed is not entirely utopian.

## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> For two versions of the extraversion argument, see Jean-François Bayart, "Africa in the World: A History of Extraversion," African Affairs 99 (2000): 216-67, and Frederick Cooper, "Africa and the World Economy," in Frederick Cooper, Allan Isaacman, Florencia Mallon, William Roseberry, and Steven Stern, Confronting Historical Paradigms: Peasants, Labor, and the Capitalist World System in Africa and Latin America (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 84-201.

<sup>ii</sup> The literature on the slave trade is now huge, but for starters see David Eltis, The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) and—for a vivid account and contextualization of an 18<sup>th</sup>-century slaving voyage--Robert Harms, The Diligent: A Voyage through the Worlds of the Slave Trade (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

<sup>iii</sup> The argument is developed at slightly greater length in Cooper, "Africa and the World Economy," and illustrated effectively in J. D. Y. Peel, Ijeshas and Nigerians: The Incorporation of a Yoruba Kingdom, 1890s-1970s (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>iv</sup> Paul E. Lovejoy, Transformations in Slavery 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>v</sup> Pioneering studies include Sara Berry, Cocoa, Custom and Socio-Economic Change in Rural Western Nigeria (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975) and Polly Hill, Migrant Cocoa Farmers of Southern Ghana: A Study in Rural Capitalism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963). A recent study is Gareth Austen, Labour, Land and Capital in Ghana: From Slavery to Free Labour in Asante (Rochester NY: University of Rochester Press, 2005).

<sup>vi</sup> Mahmood Mamdani, Subject and Citizen: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

<sup>vii</sup> Mark Beissinger and Crawford Young, "Introduction: Comparing State Crises across two Continents," in Beissinger and Young, Beyond State Crisis? Postcolonial Africa and Post-Soviet Eurasia in Comparative Perspective (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2002), 11, put the colonial state alongside Stalinism as the "peak of the development of the transformative state that materialized out of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Europe." Before the 1940s, it would be more accurate to characterize colonial development policy as piece-meal, underfunded projects lacking in coherence and repeatedly compromised by fear that transformations would undercut tenuous authority systems. After the 1940s, the idea of a transformative state is more apt, but the new policy both followed upon a wave of African activism and was accompanied by and stimulating even more political mobilization in the 1950s—something not associated with Stalinism. Beissinger and Young elsewhere acknowledge that the activist, developmentalist state was a post-war phenomenon. "Convergence to Crisis: Pre-Independence State Legacies and Post-Independence State Breakdown in Africa and Eurasia," 26 For more on the continuities and break points in development thinking, see Frederick Cooper and Randall Packard, eds.,

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International Development and the Social Sciences: Essays on the History and Politics of Knowledge (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

<sup>viii</sup> John Lonsdale and Bruce Berman, Coping with the Contradictions: The Development of the Colonial State in Kenya, " Journal of African History 20 (1979): 487-506.

<sup>ix</sup> The best introduction to the agricultural history of colonial Africa is Sara Berry, No Condition is Permanent: The Social Dynamics of Agrarian Change in Sub-Saharan Africa (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993).

<sup>x</sup> This argument is developed in Frederick Cooper, "Urban Space, Industrial Time, and Wage Labor in Africa," in Cooper (ed.), Struggle for the City: Migrant Labor, Capital, and the State in Urban Africa (Beverly Hills, California: Sage, 1983), 7-50.

<sup>xi</sup> Stephen Constantine, The Making of British Colonial Development Policy 1914-1940 (London: Frank Cass and Co., 1984).

<sup>xii</sup> For a revealing new account of the depression in a British colony, see Moses Ochonu, "A Colony in Crisis: Northern Nigeria, British Colonialism, and the Great Depression," Ph.D. diss, University of Michigan, 2004

<sup>xiii</sup> Frederick Cooper, Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), chapter 3.

<sup>xiv</sup> Cooper, Decolonization and African Society.

<sup>xv</sup> Cooper, Decolonization, chapter 7; Gregory Mann, "Immigrants and Arguments in France and West Africa," Comparative Studies in Society and History 45 (2003): 362-85.

<sup>xvi</sup> Jean Marie Allman, The Quills of the Porcupine: Asante Nationalism in an Emergent Ghana (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993); Bjorn Beckman, Organizing the Farmers: Cocoa Politics and National Development in Ghana (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1976); Richard Jeffries, Class, Power and Ideology in Ghana: The Railwaymen of Sekondi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

<sup>xvii</sup> Steven Feierman, Peasant Intellectuals: Anthropology and History in Tanzania (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990).

<sup>xviii</sup> Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa. Book Two: Violence and Ethnicity (London: James Currey, 1992); Caroline Elkins, Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of the End of Empire in Kenya (New York: Henry Holt, 2005); David Anderson, Histories of the Hanged: Britain's Dirty War and the End of Empire (New York: Norton, 2005). Richard Joseph, Radical Nationalism in Cameroun: Social Origins of the UPC Rebellion (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

<sup>xix</sup> Frederick Cooper, "Modernizing Bureaucrats, Backward Africans, and the Development Concept," in Cooper and Randall Packard (eds.), International Development and the Social



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Sciences: Essays in the History and Politics of Knowledge (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997,) 64-92.

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. Prime Minister's Minute, 28 January 1957, CAB 134/1555, Public Record Office, London (PRO). This review was to be conducted through the Colonial Policy Committee. The cost of French colonies was turned into a public issue by the journalist Raymond Cartier, "En France Noire avec Raymond Cartier." Paris-Match 383 (11 August 1956): 38-41, 384 (18 August 1946): 34-37, and 386 (1 September 1956): 39-41.

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. Pierre-Henri Teitgen, Assemblée Nationale, Débats, 20 March 1956, 1072-73.

xxii "Future Constitutional Development in the Colonies," Report by the Chairman of the Official Committee on Colonial Policy (Norman Brook), 6 September 1957, CPC (57) 30, CAB 134/1556, 5-6, PRO.

xxiii This argument and the statistics cited above are from Frederick Cooper, Africa Since 1940: The Past of the Present (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), chapter 5. On the change in the relationship of African states to the international system in the 1970s, see Christopher Clapham, Africa and the International System: The Politics of State Survival (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

xxiv For an argument critical of "leapfrogging legacies" and other misleading approaches to the history of colonialism, see Frederick Cooper, Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), esp. chapter 1.

xxv The thinness of nationalism was suggested long ago by Aristide Zolberg, Creating Political Order: The Party States of West Africa (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1966). Among more recent interpretations of the dilemmas of postcolonial states, see Jean-François Bayart, The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly (London: Longman, 1993 [trans. from French 1989]), and Achille Mbembe, On the Postcolony (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

xxvi Catherine Boone, Political Topographies of the African State: Territorial Authority and Institutional Choice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Lauren Morris MacLean, "Empire of the Young: The Legacies of State Agricultural Policy on Local Capitalism and Social Support Networks in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire" Comparative Studies in Society and History 46 (2004): 469-96.

xxvii Gavin Kitching, Class and Economic Change in Kenya: The Making of an African Petite-Bourgeoisie (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980); Sandra Barnes, Patrons and Power: Creating a Political Community in Metropolitan Lagos (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

xxviii Sara Berry, Fathers Work for Their Sons: Accumulation, Mobility, and Class Formation in an Extended Yoruba Community (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

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<sup>xxix</sup> There was not necessarily a sharp line between the strategies of gatekeeping state elites and gatehopping networks, for rulers sometimes worked through networks rather than state institutions. See for example Janet Roitman, Fiscal Disobedience: An Anthropology of Economic Regulation in Central Africa (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

<sup>xxx</sup> On networks that surpass or take over the state, see William Reno, Warlord Politics and African States (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1998). See also Michael Bratton and Nicolas van de Walle. Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transitions in Comparative Perspective (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>xxxi</sup> World Bank, Can Africa Claim the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? (Washington: The World Bank, 2000).

<sup>xxxii</sup> For useful studies on such questions, see Richard Joseph, ed., State, Conflict and Democracy in Africa (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1999) and Michael Bratton and Nicolas van de Walle. Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transitions in Comparative Perspective (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). On the relationship between international efforts to promote democracy and economic development, see Peter Lewis, "Economic Reform and the Discourse of Democracy in Africa: Resolving the Contradictions," in Beissinger and Young, Beyond State Crisis? 291-320.